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Sir Gawain seized his lance and bade them farewell

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A

KNIGHT OF ARTHUR'S COURT

OR THE TALE OF

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

TRANSLATED AND ADAPTED FOR SCHOOL USE

BY

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PREFACE

THIS tale from the golden age of chivalry is here presented in suitable form for children of the elementary schools in the hope that they may get from it the atmosphere and generous spirit of that most picturesque stage in the history of the world, — an atmosphere hardly to be successfully conveyed by any other than a contemporary account.

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SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Part I

CHRISTMAS AT ARTHUR'S COURT

CHRISTMAS AT ARTHUR'S COURT

ARTHUR, the king, kept Christmas at Camelot with many courteous lords and ladies of the best. The proud brotherhood of the Round Table held princely revel with reckless merriment. The noble knights engaged in jousts, in tournaments, and in making carols. The feast lasted fifteen days with all delights that men could devise. There was the noisy glee, glorious to hear, blameless mirth by day, and dancing by night. All was joy in hall and chamber. With the riches of the earth, they dwelt there together, the most renowned knights in Christendom, the loveliest ladies in the world, and he, the comeliest king that ever held a court.

They celebrated the New Year with great festivity. On that day, the people who sat at the table of state were served with double portions. When the king and his knights entered the hall, the services in the chapel came to an end. The clerks and others made loud clamor, and Christmas was often named and commemorated anew. Gifts were asked for and bestowed by the nobles and ladies among themselves, and those who received were not angry, you may well believe. Such sport they made until dinner time. Then they took their seats at the table according to their rank, as was most fitting. Queen Guinevere appeared in their midst, arrayed in the finest silk and the most costly fabrics of Toulouse. Her garments were embroidered with resplendent gems, and above her was spread a gorgeous canopy. Her gray eyes gleamed, and a fairer lady might no one say he had ever seen.

But Arthur was so joyous and so child-

like, he would not eat until all were served. His young blood and his wild brain so wrought upon him, that he would not sit long or be quiet. He was also moved after another fashion. He had taken a pledge never to dine upon such a day until there had been related to him an uncouth tale of some adventurous thing, or some great marvel of arms; or until some brave knight had challenged him to a joust, to lay in jeopardy life for life and to trust to Fortune for success. This was the custom of the king at each goodly feast, when he held court in the great hall. Therefore he sat alert, strong, and bold of face, and jested with them all.

Thus the king before the high table talked courteously about trifles. Gawain, the good, was seated on one side of Guinevere, and Agravayn of the strong hand, on the other, both sons of the king's sister, and well-tried knights. At the head of the table was Bishop Bawdewin and Ywain sat on the other side alone.

These were on the dais, and below them, many trusted knights at the side tables. The first course was accompanied by the blare of trumpets, the noise of drums, and wild notes wildly wakened, so that many a heart beat high at the sound. The course consisted of all the rarest dainties in such plenty, that it was difficult to find a place on the board to set the silver. Every one helped himself as he pleased and each two had twelve dishes, good ale, and bright wine.

Scarcely had the first course been served, when there rode in at the hall door a terrible knight, the tallest on earth. From his neck to his loins he was so square and thick, and his limbs were so long and so great, that he seemed to be a half-giant. He was big of breast and back, but small of waist, and all his features were in keeping with his form. He proceeded as a hostile warrior, and men wondered at his hue, which was everywhere a bright green. Fair flowing locks in-

closed his shoulders, and a great beard, like a bush, hung over his breast. His hair and beard were evenly trimmed round above his elbows, so that half his arms were inclosed as by a hood.

The Green Knight was gayly accoutered. The mantle of his close-fitting coat and his hood, which lay upon his shoulders, were adorned with the finest fur. The calves of his legs were incased in green hose and his spurs were of bright gold. All his vesture was verily pure green, even the bars of his belt and the gay gems that richly bordered his fair array. The silk work about himself and his saddle was embroidered with birds and flies, and gay gauds of green, studded with gold. The pendants of his horse's neck-defense, the proud crupper, and all the metal were enameled with green. His saddle-bows and his noble stirrups ever gleamed and shone with green stones.

The steed that he rode upon was green, an immense war-horse, and one hard to

manage. His mane was curled and combed and plaited with threads of gold among the green, ever a fillet of the mane, and then one of gold. His tail was bound with a band of bright green, as long as the tail itself, and adorned with precious gems. At the top, the band was twisted into a close knot, whereon rang many bright bells of burnished gold. Such a steed and such a knight were never seen before. The man's eyes flashed like lightning and it seemed that no one might endure his blows.

He wore no helmet nor hauberk nor any plate that pertained to arms, neither did he carry spear nor shield. In one hand he had a holly branch, which is ever greenest when the groves are bare, and in the other, a huge battle-ax, forged of green steel and gold. The head of the ax was a yard long, and the bit, burnished bright, was as well shaped to cut as a sharp razor. The proud knight gripped the ax by a strong handle incased in

iron and engraved with green. A cord, looped at the head, folded the handle all about. Upon it at short intervals, were buttons of bright green, to which were attached costly tassels. The knight entered the hall and advanced quickly to the high dais. Saluting no one, he said, "Where is the governor of this *gang?* Gladly would I see that man and speak reason with him." He looked toward the knights and swaggered back and forth. Then he stopped and pondered who there had most renown.

They looked long upon the new-comer, for each one marveled what it could mean that both man and horse should be of such a hue, green as the grass, and greener, shining brighter than green enamel upon gold. All scrutinized the knight and stalked nearer to him, wondering what in the world he might be. Many a strange thing had they seen, but never a one like this, and they held it for illusion and magic, and were afraid to answer,

astounded at his voice. A deep silence fell throughout the rich hall, and the words of the men ceased as though sleep had taken possession of them. I deem that not all were quiet for fear, but some for good breeding, in order to let the king speak first.

Arthur, upon the dais, beheld that adventure, worthily saluted the Green Knight, for the king was never afraid, and said:

"Sir, welcome truly to this place. I am Arthur, the head of this hostel. Alight for the sake of courtesy, and tarry, I pray thee, and what thy will is, we shall know later."

"Nay, so help me God," replied the Green Knight, "to dwell any while in this place is not my errand. But the praise of thy people and thy city is lifted up on high; thy men are held the best, the strongest to ride under steel-mail, the most active and most worthy in the world; and here is famous courtesy, as I

have heard tell: these are the things that have brought me here at this time. Ye may be sure by this branch I bear, that I come in peace and seek no harm. For had I come in warlike mood, I have hauberk and helmet at home, shield and sharp spear, and other weapons enough. But, because I did not wish for war, my accouterments are softer. If thou be so bold as all men say, thou wilt grant me by right the boon I ask."

Arthur answered, "Sir courteous knight, if thou seek battle here thou shalt not fail of an opponent."

"I seek no fight," said the knight. "Here are only beardless children. Were I incased in armor and on a high steed, there is no man present might match me. Therefore I crave in this court a Christmas sport, for it is Yule-time. If any one in this house be so hardy as to strike a stiff blow and take one in return, I shall give him this rich battle-ax for a gift, and I will receive the first stroke all bare as I

sit. If any knight here is bold enough to attempt what I propose, let him leap lightly to me and seize this weapon. I shall quit-claim it forever and it shall be his own. I will endure his blow, provided I have the right to give him one in return. However, I shall grant him a respite of a twelvemonth and a day. Make haste, and let see quickly whether any one herein dare say aught."

If the Green Knight astonished the courtiers in the hall at first, more quiet were they then, both high and low. The man settled himself in his saddle, rolled his red eyes about wickedly, bent his bristling green brows, and waved his beard, while waiting to see who would arise.

When no one spoke, he coughed and hemmed contemptuously, and said straightway, "What! Is this Arthur's court, the fame of which extends throughout so many realms? Where are now your pride and your conquests, your fierceness and your great words? The renown

of the Round Table is overthrown by the word of one man, for all of you tremble with fear, and no one dares strike the blow."

With this he laughed so loudly, that Arthur was grieved and the blood rushed into his face on account of shame. He waxed angry as the wind, and stepped nearer to the knight.

Said he, "Sir Knight, by heaven thy request is foolish, but it behooves thee to find what thou hast asked for. I know no one who is afraid of thy great words. Give me now the battle-ax, and on God's behalf I shall grant the boon thou hast begged."

Lightly the king leaped to him and caught at his hand while the knight dismounted. Arthur gripped the handle of the great ax and swung it round, ready to strike. The bold warrior stood upright, higher by a head than any in the court. With stern look he stroked his beard, and drew down his coat. He was

no more dismayed by the threatened blow than if any man upon the bench had brought him a drink of wine.

Gawain, sitting by the queen, bent forward and besought the king that the adventure might be his. "Worthy lord," said he, "would ye bid me leave this bench and stand by you there, and if my liege lady take it not amiss, I would come to your counsel in the presence of this famous court. Methinks it is not seemly when such a challenge is raised so high in your hall, that you should take it upon yourself. Many brave knights sit around you, no better to be found under the heavens, wherever strife is aroused. I am the weakest, I know, and of wit the feeblest, and my life would be the least loss. I am praiseworthy only in so far as you are my uncle, and there is no virtue in my body except through your blood. This challenge is so foolish that it belongs not to you. Therefore I have asked first that you give

it to me. Let this powerful court decide whether I have spoken wisely."

The knights took counsel together and entreated Arthur to give the game to Gawain.

Then Gawain was commanded to approach. He arose quickly, knelt before the king, and caught the weapon. Arthur gave him his blessing, and bade him keep a stout heart and a steady hand. Said he, "Take heed thou give him such a blow, that thou shalt not need to fear the one he is to give thee in return." Gawain, with ready ax, drew near the knight, who, boldly and unabashed, awaited him. As he advanced, the Green Knight said, "Let us renew our agreement before we go further. First, I ask thee to tell me truly your name."

"In good faith, my name is Gawain. I offer thee this stroke, whatso may befall, and at this time a twelvemonth I will take one in return, with whatsoever weapon thou wilt."

"It pleases me well, Sir Gawain," replied the Green Knight, "that I shall receive the blow from thee. Thou hast stated exactly the covenant I asked of the king, but thou shalt assure me that thou wilt seek me thyself, wherever thou thinkest I may be found, and receive such a blow as thou givest me to-day in the presence of this royal court."

"Where shall I seek thee," quoth Gawain, "and where is thy place? I know neither thy name nor thy court, but if ye will tell me these truly, then I swear to use my best endeavor to find thee."

"It is sufficient at New Year," answered the Green Knight, "if I tell thee my home and my name after thou hast smitten me, and if I speak not at all, the better for thee, for then thou mayest dwell at home and seek no further. But cease talking, take thy grim tool and let see how thou knockest."

"Gladly, sir," said Gawain, as he stroked the ax.

The Green Knight, standing upon the ground, speedily prepared himself. He inclined his head a little, put his long locks aside, and laid bare his neck. Gawain braced himself for the stroke, advanced his left foot, gripped the ax, lifted it on high, and brought it down upon the naked flesh. It sundered the bones and plunged through so swiftly that the bit cut into the ground. The beautiful head fell to the earth, and many kicked it as it rolled forth. The blood sprang from the body and shone all over the green. The knight neither fell backward nor faltered, but starting stoutly forward on strong shanks, seized his lovely head and lifted it up. Then he caught the bridle of his steed, and stepping into the steel bow of the stirrup, strode aloft. There he sat in his saddle as steadily as if nothing had happened, and, turning his ugly, bleeding trunk about, he filled the hall with terror.

He held the head in his hand and

directed the face toward the noblest on the dais. It lifted up its eyelids and addressed Sir Gawain: "Look that thou be ready to go as thou hast promised and search faithfully until thou find me. Get thee to the Green Chapel, to receive such a blow as thou hast dealt, which is to be promptly given on New Year's morn. Many know the Knight of the Green Chapel, so that if thou seekest thou shalt not fail. Therefore come or be called recreant." Turning his steed about, he rushed out of the hall door so fiercely that his horse's hoofs struck fire from the flint. To what region he went no one knew any more than whence he came. At that green one, Arthur and Gawain laughed and grinned; among the men, however, it was openly spoken of as a marvel.

Although Arthur was astonished at the strange adventure, he let nothing of it appear, but addressed the comely queen with courteous speech: "Dear

lady, be not dismayed. Such a wonder well becomes the Christmas festival. It is like to an interlude in the laughing and singing of knights and ladies. Now I may go to meat; that I have seen a strange thing, I may not deny." Looking upon Gawain he said, "Sir, hang up your ax, for it has hewn quite enough."

When the ax had been placed above the dais on the back of a seat where all men could see it, the king, Gawain, and the knights sat down to the feast. Keen men served them double portions of the costliest dainties that might be had and all manner of meats. The minstrels struck their harps and joy ruled the day until it came to an end. Now, think well, Sir Gawain, lest delay in seeking the adventure ye have taken in hand cause mischief.

Part II

THE PASSING YEAR

THE PASSING YEAR

SILENTLY the men went to their seats, but when their hands were filled with stern work, they talked merrily of the strange adventure. Gawain had been eager to begin the game in the hall, yet if the end be heavy, have no wonder. For though a man be mirthful in mind while the wine flows, a year goes quickly, and its like comes not again. The beginning and the ending seldom accord.

Christmas passed away, and the year after, each season coming in turn. Following Yuletide, came the crabbed Lent, that tried the folk, with fish and simple food. The warm weather struggled with the winter. The clinging cold was dissipated, the clouds were scattered, and the warm bright showers of rain fell. The ground was covered with flowers and

the groves were dressed in green. Birds hastened to build and sang gayly for joy of the soft summer that followed. The blossoms opened in the rich, rank hedgerows, and noble notes were heard in the beautiful wood.

After the season of summer with its soft wind, the zephyrs rattled the herbs and seeds. The fullgrown plant rejoiced greatly when the dank dew fell from the leaves to await the joyous blush of the bright sun. Then harvest hied apace and warned the seed to harden and wax ripe against the winter. The drought made the dust rise and fly about over the face of the land. Boisterous winds wrestled with the sun, the leaves fluttered from the trees and fell upon the ground, the grass became gray, and everything ripened and rotted. Thus the year ran away into many yesterdays until Michaelmas with its pledge of winter came again. Then the knight began to think of his dreadful journey.

Still Gawain tarried at Arthur's court. On All-Hallows day, the king made a rich feast for him with great revel of the Round Table. The courteous knights and comely ladies had much sorrow on account of their love for Gawain, yet they mentioned nothing but mirth, and, for the sake of the noble knight, made many a jest. After meat, Gawain said to the king: "Now, liege lord, I ask permission to depart. Ye know the state of this case, and I care not to speak further of troubles that are but trifles. I am bound to seek the Green Knight, as God shall direct me."

Many nobles, the best of the court, crowded near to counsel him. Great sorrow prevailed in the hall because one so worthy should go on an errand to endure a doleful stroke, for which he should give none in return. Gawain made ever good cheer and said, "Why should I shrink from stern destiny? What should a man do but try?"

All that day he lingered at the court, but early on the morn he made ready to depart. First a carpet was spread and his arms, richly bedecked with gold, were laid upon it. Then the valiant knight stepped thereon and handled the steel. He was clad in a doublet of Tarsic silk and a well-made hood lined with costly fur. They put iron shoes upon his feet, and lapped his legs in steel greaves with rivets of gold. They incased his brawny thighs with fair guards and inclosed his body with the woven mail of bright steel rings. Then they fastened the well-burnished braces, the good elbow pieces, and the gloves of plate. Over all, they placed the rich coat armor, set his golden spurs, and girded him with a well-tried sword.

When Gawain was thus cased in arms, he heard mass at the high altar. Then he came to Arthur and his court companions. Lovingly he took leave of lords and ladies, who kissed him and commended him to Christ. By that time his steed,

Gringolet, was ready, girt with a saddle that gleamed gayly with many gold fringes newly prepared for the occasion. The bridle was barred and wound with bright gold. The adornment of the breast-plate, the proud skirts, the crupper, and the coverture accorded with the saddle bows, and all was bordered with rich red gold that shone and glistened as a ray of the sun. The tall helmet was hasped behind. Over the ventail was a border of silk, richly embroidered with gems, and figured with innumerable birds. The circle around the helmet was decked with diamonds.

Then they brought him his shield of bright red, upon which was depicted the pentangle in pure gold. The pentangle was devised by Solomon as a token of truth. It is a figure that has five points, and each line enfolds and locks in the other, so that it everywhere continues; therefore the English call it "the endless knot." It well became Sir Gawain, for

he was ever faithful in the five tokens, void of every fault as refined gold, and endowed with the highest virtues. On that account he bore the pentangle upon his shield and his coat as a knight, the truest of speech and fairest of feature. He was faultless in his five wits; his five fingers never failed him; and his entire trust was in the five wounds Christ received upon the cross. In the midst of battle, his unwavering thought was that his strength came from the five joys which the gracious Queen of Heaven had in her Son. For that reason, the greater half of his shield was emblazoned with the image of the Virgin, to whom he looked, and who never impaired his courage. The five points in which Sir Gawain surpassed all others were liberality, fellowship, chastity, courtesy, and pity. Therefore was the endless knot fastened upon his shield. When all was finished, Sir Gawain seized his lance and bade them farewell, as he thought, for evermore.

He put spurs to his steed and sprang on his way so rashly that his horse's feet struck fire from the stones. All that saw him sighed in heart and said sorrowfully: "By heaven! it is great pity that Gawain shall be lost, who is of such noble life. To find his equal is not easy. It had been wiser to have wrought more warily; to have made him a duke, a leader of men, than to have allowed him to be broken to pieces for arrogant pride at the hand of an elfish man. Who ever knew a king to take such counsel when knights dispute in the Christmas games?" Many were the tears shed that day, when the most comely knight departed from the court. Quickly he was gone to ride a weary way through wild and desert places.

Leaving Camelot, in Somersetshire, Sir Gawain rode northward through the realms of Logres. Often he spent the long night alone where he found naught but hard fare. He had no companion but

his horse and only God to speak with by the way, until he drew full nigh to North Wales. Leaving the island of Anglesea, he crossed over to Holyhead and thence made his way into the wilderness of the Wirral, where dwelt but few that loved either God or man. Yet ever as he rode, Gawain asked those he met if they had heard anything of the Green Knight or of the Green Chapel. All answered him nay; never in their lives had they seen any man of such a hue. Still he kept on through wild roads and impassable banks, and his cheer often changed before he might see the Green Chapel.

Many a cliff he climbed over in strange country, and many a ford and stream he crossed. At each he met a foe, so foul and savage that it behooved him to fight. Such marvelous adventures he had, that to relate a tenth part of them, were tedious. Sometimes he warred with serpents and wolves; at others, with bulls and bears. At times he fought with the wood

satyrs that dwelt in the rocks; otherwhiles giants assailed him from the high crag. Had he not been brave and hardy, and serving God, doubtless he had been dead. War harmed him less than the sharp winter, when the cold fell from the clouds and froze before it might reach the earth. Almost slain by the sleet, he slept in his armor in the naked rocks, where the winter stream ran clattering from the crest and hung high over his head in hard icicles

Thus, in peril and in pain, Sir Gawain rode till Christmas-eve, when he made his moan to the Virgin Mary and prayed her to guide him to some abode. On that morning he had ridden by a mountain into a deep forest which was wondrously wild. There were high hills on each side and the wood was filled with great oaks, hundreds together. The hazel and the hawthorn were intertwined, and rough, ragged moss spread everywhere. Many birds sat upon the bare twigs and piped

piteously on account of the cold. The knight upon Gringolet glided under them, through many a quagmire, all alone, troubled about his labors and anxious lest he should not arrive at some place where he could celebrate the birth of Christ. Sighing, he said: "I beseech thee, Lord, and Mary, that is highest Mother so dear, for some shelter where I may devoutly hear mass and matins on the morn. Therefore meekly I pray Paternoster, Ave, and Credo." Thus as he rode, he crossed himself and cried aloud for his misdeeds: "Cross of Christ, speed me!"

Scarcely had he made the sign thrice, ere he was aware of a dwelling in the wood. It stood in a lawn upon a hill, locked under the boughs of many a bushy tree, — a castle the comeliest that ever a knight owned. The burnished palace, many-pinnacled, was surrounded by a spiked palisade, more than two miles in extent.

Gawain gazed upon the building as it shimmered and shone through the bright oaks, courteously removed his helmet and gave thanks to Christ and Saint Julian, who had directed his way and hearkened to his cry. "Now," said he, "I beseech you for a good hostel." Then he put his gold spurs to Gringolet and by chance chose the way to the main entrance. He arrived quickly and found the drawbridge raised and the gates shut fast.

The knight halted on the bank of the deep, double ditch that encircled the castle. The wall went down into the water wondrously far and towered aloft to a huge height. The hard, hewn stone reached up to the corbels, supported under the battlements in the very best manner. Watch-towers well-furnished with loopholes were placed at regular intervals. A better barbican the knight never looked upon. Within he beheld the high hall, turreted and ornamented with carved capitals. Many chalk-white chimneys

blinked upon the castellated roofs. The painted pinnacles, scattered everywhere among the castle embrasures, clustered so thick that the structure seemed to be cut out of white paper. Gawain thought it fair enough, if he might only come within the cloister to shelter in that hostel while the holiday lasted. He called, and immediately a porter upon a wall saluted the knight-errant.

"Good sir," said Gawain, "wouldst thou go mine errand to the high lord of this house, to crave harbor?"

"Yea, by Saint Peter!" replied the porter, "and I trow well that ye be welcome to dwell here as long as ye like."

The wight departed at once and came again with a large company to receive the knight. They let down the great drawbridge, went joyfully out, and knelt upon the cold earth to welcome Sir Gawain, as one who seemed to them worthy. They invited him to enter, and without delay he passed over the bridge. Serving-

men seized his saddle and stabled his horse. Knights and squires came down and escorted him gayly into the hall. When he lifted off his helmet, many hastened to take it from his hand. Likewise they took his sword and shield. Then he addressed most courteously the nobles each one, and many proud men there thronged to honor him. All hasped in his armor, they brought him to the place where a great fire burned fiercely upon the floor. The lord of the castle descended from his chamber to meet the guest, saying, "Ye are welcome to rule as ye like; whatever is here is all your own to have and to possess at your will."

"Gramercy," replied Gawain, "may Christ reward thee."

They embraced each other as knights that were glad to meet. Gawain looked upon his host who seemed a bold warrior. His beaver-hued beard was broad, and his face red as fire. He was noble of speech and well fitted to be lord of a

goodly people. He led Gawain to a chamber and assigned a page to serve him. There were ready at his command men enough who conducted him to a bright bower, furnished with costly bedding. The curtains were of beautiful cloth, curiously decorated and embroidered with rare fur, and the canopies ran upon ropes by means of red gold rings. Tapestries of Tars and Toulouse covered the walls and the floors. There, with speeches of mirth, the knight was despoiled of his cuirass and his bright armor. Men brought him rich robes from which he might choose the best. The flowing garments became him well, and when he was fully arrayed, he appeared to each of the nobles present the comeliest knight that Christ ever made, a prince without peer in the field where brave men fight.

A chair before the chimney was quickly prepared for Sir Gawain, hassocks were brought for his feet, and a brown mantle of linen, adorned with a hood and lined

with the finest ermine, was cast over him. In that richly-furnished seat he warmed himself and his heart was glad. Soon a table was raised on two trestles, spread with a clean cloth, pure white, and laid with napkins, salt-cellar, and silver spoons. The knight washed himself and the folk served him courteously with double portions. There were fish of many kinds, — some baked in bread, some broiled upon live coals, some boiled and seasoned with spices. Full often he called it a feast and the nobles encouraged him, saying, "Take this for a penance and afterward it shall amend thee." Sir Gawain made much mirth, for the wine had gone to his head.

Then they courteously inquired of what court he might be. He replied, "The court of Arthur who is the rich, royal king of the Round Table." He also told them that it was Gawain himself who had chanced to come there at Christmastide. When the lord of the castle

learned these things, he laughed aloud for very joy, because Sir Gawain was reputed to possess all worth, prowess, and refined manners. Of all men upon the earth his chivalry was praised the most. Each one present said softly to his companion, "Now shall we see courtly bearing and hear blameless terms of noble speech. What charm there is in language we may learn without asking, since we have in our midst that fine father of nurture. For a truth God has granted us His favor in that He has permitted us to have Gawain as a guest. He shall teach us the significance of fine manners and whoso may hear him shall learn the speech of love."

By the time dinner was done and the nobles arose it was almost night. Chaplains went to the chapel and rang full loudly for the devout evensong of that high tide. The lord and lady of the castle hastened thereto and the lady entered a comely closet. Thither soon

went Gawain, and the host caught him by the lappet and led him to a seat. He addressed him familiarly, called him by name, and said that he was the most welcome knight in . Gawain thanked him earnestly; each embraced the other, and gravely they sat together during the service.

Then the lady list to look upon the knight when she came from her closet with many fair companions. She was the fairest of them all in figure, in color, and in all other particulars, — fairer than Guinevere, as Gawain thought. Another led her by the left hand, an ancient lady, so it seemed, who was highly honored by the nobles. The two were very unlike to look upon. The younger was fair and the other was yellow. Rich crimson overspread the countenance of the one everywhere, and the other had rough, wrinkled cheeks. The one was adorned with kerchiefs set with clear pearls. Her breast and throat, all bare, shone brighter

than the snow that falls upon the hills. The other had her throat wrapped in a ruff; her dark chin was enfolded with milk-white veils; her forehead folded in silk so that there were exposed only the black brows, the eyes, the nose, and the naked, sour lips. Her body was short and thick; far more pleasing to look upon was the one whom she led.

With the permission of the lord, Sir Gawain went to meet them. He saluted the elder, bowing full low, but the lovelier one he kissed according to courtly fashion, and addressed her as became a knight. She spoke to him most graciously and he begged to be her servant. Taking him between them, they returned to the chimney in the hall. They called for spices and the cheerful wine, which men brought unsparingly. Full often the host arose and announced mirth to be made. He took off his hood and hung it upon a spear as a prize to the one who should make the greatest merriment at that Christmas

tide. "By my faith," said he, "ere I lose my hood, I shall try to fool it with the best."

Thus with laughing words the lord made merry, and entertained Sir Gawain with sports in the hall that night. At the proper time, he commanded the lights to be brought in, and the knight took his leave and addressed himself to bed.

Upon the morning on which the Lord was born for our destiny, joy reigns in every dwelling in the world for His sake. So it did there on that day. An immense feast was made and choice dishes of wondrous variety were placed before the people upon the dais. The lord of the castle and the ancient lady occupied the highest seats. Sir Gawain sat by the hostess, and the others were arranged according to their degrees. There was meat, there was fun, and there was joy, — which to describe were tedious. Gawain and the lovely lady found much comfort in each other's conversation

while the trumpets and the kettledrums sounded the music of the banquet.

Great was the revelry for three days, that of St. John's day being the last and the noblest. There were guests to go upon the gray morn, therefore they watched late, drank the red wine, and danced full vigorously to the dear carols. At last, they took their leave, each to travel on his way. Gawain gave his host farewell, but the good man drew him aside, thanked him for the joy he had brought by honoring his house at that high tide, and gladdening his castle with his fine cheer. "Truly," said he, "while I live, to me it shall be the better that Gawain has been my guest at God's own feast."

"Gramercy, sir," replied Gawain, "in good faith the honor is all thine own and may the High King reward thee. I am ready at thy will to work thy behest, as by right I am bound thereto, in high and low."

Then the host endeavored to keep Sir

Gawain longer, but the knight told him that it might not be on any account. At last the lord of the castle asked him expressly what secret deed had driven him so keenly at that time from Arthur's court, before the end of the Christmas holidays.

"Truly," said the knight, "a high errand and a hasty one has brought me thence. I am summoned to seek a place which, in this wide world, I know not where to find. For all the land there is in Logres, I would not fail to reach it on New Year's morn, so help me God. Therefore, sir, I request that ye tell me truly, if ye ever heard of the Green Chapel, and the Green Knight who keeps it. There is an agreement between us that I meet him at that place upon the New Year's day, which now draws so nigh. By God's dear Son, I would look upon that knight more gladly than I would upon a great possession. Therefore, by thy leave, I must needs journey, for I have barely

three days left and I had as lief fall dead as fail of my errand."

Quoth the lord, "It behooves thee to tarry. Trouble thyself no more, for I shall direct thee to the Green Chapel before the appointed time. Ye shall remain at ease in your bed until the fourth day. On the first day of the year, ye shall ride forth and come to the place by mid-morn; the chapel is not two miles hence. Therefore dwell here until the New Year's. Then arise and proceed; one of my men shall set you on the way."

Full glad was Gawain when he heard that and gayly he laughed. "Now I thank thee most heartily. My quest is achieved. I shall remain at thy will and do else as thou mayest decide."

Then the host put his arm round Gawain's neck, seated him by his side, and caused the ladies to be fetched. Said he to the knight, "Ye have agreed to do that which I bade; will ye grant a request which I shall ask at this time?"

"Yea, sir," said the knight, "while I abide in thy castle, I shall be obedient to thy wish."

The lord replied, "Ye have traveled from afar, spent the night in revelry, and ye shall tarry in your bed-chamber, and lie at your ease in the morning until the time to celebrate the mass. When ye desire, ye shall go to meat with my wife, who will comfort you with her company until I shall return. I shall arise early to follow the hunt." To this Gawain courteously agreed.

"Yet further," said the lord, "let us make a compact. Whatsoever I win in the wood shall be yours and what fortune ye achieve shall be mine. Sweet sir, let us swear truly thus to exchange, whether it be for better or for worse."

Said Gawain the Good, "By God, I agree, for the game that ye choose to play pleases me well."

So the bargain was made and pledged with wine. The lords and ladies passed

away the time in gay talk and merry jest, after which, with many fair words, they arose, kissed each other courteously, and said good-night. With flaming torches and a retinue of attendants each was brought to his bed at last. Ere they went the covenant was recorded full often, for the old lord of that land knew well how to keep the sport in hand.

Part III

THE GREEN GIRDLE

THE GREEN GIRDLE

LONG before day the people arose. The guests that were to go called their grooms, who hastened to prepare their masters' apparel, pack their bags, and saddle their horses. The noble knights, all arrayed for riding, leaped up lightly, caught their bridles, and each one went where it pleased him.

The lord of the castle was not the last to be ready. He ate a sop hastily, and when he had heard mass, accompanied by many a retainer, hurried to the field. Before daylight gleamed upon the earth, he and his nobles were mounted. The hunters opened the kennel doors, called out the dogs and coupled them together. Three loud, short notes were blown upon the bugles, the hounds bayed, and a wild

noise marked the course. The keepers went to their stations, the leashes were cast off, and a great blare of trumpets rang through the forest.

At the first noise of the quest the wild beasts quaked. The deer, foolish with fright, rushed through the dale, hastened to the heights, but were quickly driven back by the shouts of the men at the stations. The harts with the high heads, and the fierce bucks with the broad antlers, were allowed to pass, for the noble lord had forbidden that any one should injure the males. The hinds and the does were held in with "hay and ware" and driven to the deep valleys. At each, as she slipped under the boughs, sped an arrow, which, with its broad head, savagely wounded the brown side. The hounds in a rush followed swiftly, and the men hurried after. The deer that escaped the arrows were run down at the stations. They were turned back from the hills and harassed at the waters by

the great greyhounds, and slain as fast as men might look. The lord of the land shouted for very joy at the chase, which lasted until nightfall.

In the meantime, Sir Gawain lay in bed. While the early daylight streamed upon the walls, he slept, curtained all about. At last he roused himself, opened his eyes, and made ready to meet his hostess who had knocked gently at his door. With small, laughing lips and cheeks mingled with white and red, the lady looked most lovely as she said, "I know well thou art Sir Gawain, that all the world honors. My lord and his men are far away and since I have thee in this house, I shall use the time well while it lasts, with discourse."

"In good faith," replied Gawain, "to reach to such reverence, I am not worthy, but it were pure joy to please thee with words or service."

The gay lady answered, "It were little honor in me to esteem lightly the courage

and prowess that please all others. But there are ladies enough who would rather listen to thy noble words than to have much gold and treasure."

Thus the hostess made him great cheer and ever the knight answered with modest speech. Merrily they held converse until the mid-morn was past and the lady was taking her leave. Suddenly she stood and spake with a laughing glance, "I am doubtful after all whether ye be Gawain. So courteous is he reported, that surely ere this, he would have craved a kiss."

"Plead no further," said he. "As becometh a knight, I yield to thy command."

Without more ado the lady took her departure and Gawain hastened to the mass. With the two dames, the elder and the younger, he made mirth all the day until the moon rose.

By the time daylight was done, the lord of the castle returned from the hunt. He commanded all his household to as-

semble and the deer to be brought before him. He called Sir Gawain, showed him the plump beasts, saying, "How does this please you? Have I won honor and do I deserve hearty thanks on account of my skill?"

"Yea, truly," said the knight. "Here is the finest game I have seen this seven year, in the season of winter."

"I give it all to you, Sir Gawain, for by our agreement it is your own."

"So it is," replied Gawain, "and I say the same. I have worthily won this, and certainly with as good will I yield it to thee." With that, he put his arms round the neck of the lord and kissed him as comely as he knew how.

"Gramercy," quoth the host, "the kiss is good, but it were better should ye tell me where ye won it."

"That was not the agreement," answered Gawain, "so ask me no further."

They laughed and made merry as they proceeded to supper. While they sat

by the chimney, the wine was carried around, and Sir Gawain and his host renewed the compact to exchange whatever they should achieve the next day. Then they took their leave of each other and hastened to bed. Scarcely had the cock crowed thrice ere the lord was up. The breakfast and the mass were quickly dispatched, and before daybreak, the men were ready for the chase.

With a stern shout they encouraged the hounds, and forty at once fell upon the scent. Then such a yelping clamor arose that the rocks rang. The hunters urged them on with voice and with horn, and they all swayed together between a dark pool and a wide crag. There they gathered in a knot with the quarry at bay. The men beat the bushes, when out rushed a fierce wild boar, the largest ever seen. He felled three of the dogs at the first thrust and made off, but the hunters quickly followed and again brought him to bay. The broad-headed

arrows fell like hail upon his thick hide, against which they were shivered to pieces. Enraged with the blows, he attacked the men, wounded some of them terribly, spread consternation everywhere and fled. But the lord of the land upon a fleet horse pursued, blowing his bugle and following him through wilds and thickets until the sun sank in the west.

All this time Gawain rested in the castle, and again his hostess visited him. Having seated herself by his side, she said laughingly, "Sir, if ye be Sir Gawain, it seems to me a wonder that ye have forgotten what I taught you yesterday."

"What is that?" he asked. "If what ye say be true, the blame is my own.'

"I taught you of kissing," quoth she, "which becomes every courteous knight."

"That I durst not proffer," replied he, "lest I be denied, and then I should be put in the wrong."

"But," said the lady, "ye are strong enough to constrain, if ye wish."

"Your speech is true," answered Sir Gawain, "but a threat is discourteous in the country in which I dwell, and every gift is worthless that is not bestowed willingly. I am at your command to kiss when you like. You may take as you list and leave off when you please."

Upon this the lady graciously saluted him with a kiss. Then she said, "From the flower of chivalry, the one most praised in the sport of love and in the science of arms, I would learn something of his skill. It is the chief glory of a true knight to tell how for loyal love he ventured his life, endured grievous times, avenged wrongs with his valor, and brought bliss into the bower. Ye are the comeliest of Arthur's court, and your words and your worship are bruited everywhere. I have sat by you here twice, yet have never heard a word that pertained to love. Ye, that are so courte-

ous and so wise, ought to teach one inexperienced like me, some token of the craft of true love."

"In good faith," said Sir Gawain, "it is great pleasure to me that one so worthy should come hither to trouble herself with so poor a man. But to undertake to expound the one-half of true love and the practice of arms, requires more skill than there is in a hundred such as I. By my troth, I were a fool a hundred-fold to attempt it. I will, however, be your servant ever, as I am highly beholden."

Thus, Gawain avoided even the appearance of evil, and his hostess, having kissed him again, took her departure and went her way. Then he arose and hastened to the mass, after which, dinner was prepared and joyfully served. While he was passing the day gayly in the company of the ladies, the lord of the castle pursued the wild boar. Full often he rode over the land after the ugly swine, which rushed from the high banks and broke

in sunder the backs of the dogs. The arrows fell thick and fast as the hunters gathered around him. At last the brute was so weary that he could run no more. With what haste he might, he made for a hole in a rock by the side of a brook, and getting the bank behind him, whetted his white tusks, until the froth foamed at his mouth. The bold hunters assaulted him from afar, but he was so fierce and mad with rage, that none durst approach nigh for fear of being torn to pieces.

At last the lord himself came, saw the boar at bay and the hunters standing around. Reining his steed, he lighted quickly down, drew a bright blade, and strode boldly forth into the stream. When the furious beast was aware of the man with weapon in hand, his bristles stood on end and he snorted so savagely that many feared for their lord lest the worst should befall him. Suddenly the boar leaped upon the knight, so that man

None durst approach nigh for fear of being torn to pieces

and quarry fell in a heap in the swiftest part of the current. But the boar had the worst of it, for the man had marked him well as they met, set the sharp point of the blade into the hollow above the breastbone, and drove it up to the hilt. The heart was split in twain and the ferocious brute fell snarling. As he swept quickly down the torrent, a hundred hounds seized him, and the hunters dragged him ashore for them to worry.

At the end of the fierce chase, there was loud blowing of the horns, hallooing of the men, and prolonged baying of the hounds. The most skilled of the hunters hewed off the great head and bound the carcass to a stout pole. Then they hastened back to the castle, the head, borne by the lord himself. Arriving at the hall he called for the knight to come and receive the spoil.

The bluff lord laughed merrily when he saw Sir Gawain. As soon as the ladies were brought and the retainers

gathered around, he showed them the sides of the boar, stated his length and breadth, and told of the wild hunt in the wood. They handled the huge head and Sir Gawain praised his host and commended his valor. Such a beast and such sides of a swine he had never seen. The lord said, "Now, Sir Gawain, this is yours by fast agreement as ye well know."

"That is true," answered the knight, "and as certainly true, that all my gain I shall give to thee." Then he took the lord round the neck and kissed him twice. "Now are we even of all the covenants that we made since I came hither."

"By Saint Giles," quoth the lord, "ye are the best I know. Ye will be rich in a little while if ye drive such bargains."

Immediately they set up tables on trestles and lighted waxen tapers on the walls. The knights sat in the hall and were served. Much mirth and glee arose about the fire both at supper and after. Many noble songs were sung, — songs

of Christmas and new carols, with all the delights one may think of. And ever Sir Gawain sat beside the lady, who did all that she could to captivate him.

When they had lingered in the hall as long as it pleased them, the lord called the knight into an inner chamber. They sat down by the wide fireplace, and the host proposed a renewal of the covenant for New Year's eve. But Sir Gawain craved leave to depart the next morning, for his appointed time drew near. The lord urged him to stay and said, "As I am a true man I pledge my word ye shall arrive at the Green Chapel to perform your task on New Year's morn, long before prime. Therefore lie in thy bed and take thy ease. I shall hunt in the wood, and when I return we will exchange booty according to our agreement. I have tried you twice and found you faithful; on the morrow shall be the third test and the best. Let us make merry while we may and think upon joy,

for one may catch misfortune whensoever it pleases him."

So the compact was renewed and the knight agreed to tarry. Blithely they drank the wine and went to bed. Sir Gawain lay and slept full still and softly all night long, but the lord was up early. After hearing mass, he hastily ate a morsel and asked for his horse. All the men who were to ride with him were before the hall gates, mounted and ready.

It was a clear frosty morning; the land wondrously fair. The sun rose red in the fog and scattered the clouds. The hunters dispersed at the side of a wood, and the rocks reverberated with the blast of horns. Soon they struck the trail of a fox; the bay of a hound gave the signal, and the pack took up the cry. The fox twisted and turned through many a rough grove and paused often to listen intently. At last, by a little ditch, he leaped out of a thicket, stole silently along a rugged path, and thus thought

to escape from the wood. Suddenly he came upon a chosen tryst of the hunters, where three bold ones in a rush threatened him at once. He drew back quickly and with all the woe in the world made for the grove again.

Then it was fine sport to listen to the hounds, when all the pack mingled together and caught sight of the fox. Such a din they set up as though all the neighboring cliffs had fallen in a heap. With loud shouts and halloos, the hunters oft threatened him with death, called him "thief," and ever the hounds were close upon him so that he might not tarry. But Reynard was wily and led the tired lord and his men among the hills, now on the tops, now in the vales.

Meanwhile, the knight slept on within his comely curtains. But the lady of the castle arose early and clad herself in a rich mantle that reached even to the earth. Instead of a golden circlet upon her head, she wore a kerchief twined with

precious stones, twenty in a cluster. Calling to Gawain she saluted him: "Sir Knight, how canst thou sleep, this morning is so fair?"

In fitful slumber he lay dreaming, troubled by the destiny which might befall him on the day he should meet the knight at the Green Chapel. But when his fair visitor spake, he started out of his dreams and made ready to answer her call. Great joy warmed the heart of Sir Gawain as he saw her so glorious and so gayly attired, so fine of feature and so bright of hue. They met each other smilingly and all was good cheer that passed between them.

When it became time for her to depart she said to the knight, "Give me something for a token, thy glove, perhaps, by which I may remember thee."

"Now truly," replied Gawain, "I would I had here the most costly thing I possess, for ye are worthy of a better reward than I can bestow. It is not in keeping

with your honor to have at this time a glove for a token, and I am here on an uncouth errand and have no servant, nor bags containing precious things. That displeases me much, lady, but a man must fare as he can and take no ill nor grief."

"Nay, courteous knight," answered the lovesome lady, "though I had naught of yours, yet should ye have of mine."

Then she handed him a ring of red gold, set with a flashing stone, whose beams blushed as the bright sun. But the knight declined to accept it since he had nothing to give in return.

Said the lady very sorrowfully, "If ye refuse my ring because it is so costly and because ye do not wish to be so highly beholden to me, I shall give you my girdle which is of lesser worth."

Then she took off her belt, wrought of green silk and gold and braided with the fingers. She offered it to the knight and besought him to take it, although it were

entirely unworthy. Still he said nay; he would accept neither gold nor trinket until God should send him grace to achieve the adventure he had undertaken. "And therefore, I pray you, be not displeased and let be your urging, for I may not consent. I am dearly beholden to you on account of your kindness, and ever in heat and cold, I shall be your true servant."

"Do ye refuse this silk," asked the lady, "because it is simple in itself and seemeth so? Lo, it is little and less in worth, but whoso knew the virtues knit therein, he would perhaps prize it at a greater value. For whoever is girded with this green lace, as long as he has it closely fastened about him, there is no man under heaven that may cut him to pieces. He may not be slain by any stratagem on earth."

Sir Gawain bethought him, and it came into his heart that the lace were a jewel for the jeopardy that was appointed for

him, when he should reach the Green Chapel to receive the return blow. Might he but escape unslain, the stratagem were noble. Then he bore with her chiding and suffered her to speak, and again she proffered the belt and pressed him to accept it. He consented and the lady gave it with a good will, beseeching him for her sake never to reveal it, and to keep the secret loyally from her lord. Sir Gawain agreed that no one should ever know it except themselves. He thanked her full oft and earnestly, and before she had taken her leave, she had kissed him thrice.

When his hostess had gone, Sir Gawain concealed the love-lace about his person. He then hurried to the chapel and was absolved from all his sins as securely as though doomsday had been the next morning. Returning to the hall, he made such cheer among the ladies with his comely carols that they said, "Thus merry has he never been since he came hither."

Meanwhile Gawain's host was still in the field. As he leaped over a hedge, he spied Reynard running through a rough grove with the whole pack close upon his heels. Warily he watched his coming, and as he drew near, snatched out his bright sword and hurled it at him. The fox swerved to escape the blow, and was seized by one of the dogs. Right before the horse's feet they all fell upon him and worried him with angry snarls. The lord alighted quickly, snatched Reynard from the furious pack, held him high over his head, and set the echoes ringing with his shouts. The hunters hastened to be in at the death, the horns sounded the end of the chase, and the hounds bayed. It was the merriest meet that ever was heard and after the dogs were rewarded the men took the fox and stripped off his coat.

Blowing full stoutly their great horns, they returned to the castle, for it was near night. The lord at last alighted at

his dear home, found a great fire in the chimney, and Sir Gawain making merry with the ladies. The knight wore a robe of blue that reached to the floor, and a surcoat softly furred, which became him well. A hood of the same, edged with fur, hung upon his shoulders. He met his host in the middle of the floor, greeted him in sport, and courteously said: "Now I shall fulfill at once the agreement that we expediently made." Then he embraced the lord and kissed him thrice.

"Truly," said the host, "ye won much fortune in this booty, if ye made a good exchange."

"Yea," quoth the knight, "never mind the exchange, since what I owe is promptly paid."

"Marry," replied the lord, "mine is behind, for I have hunted all this day and got nothing but this fox skin, — a poor reward for three such kisses."

"Enough," answered Sir Gawain, "I thank thee, by the rood."

With mirth and minstrelsy, with the laughing of the ladies and words of jest, they made as merry as men might, until the time arrived when they must betake themselves to bed. Gawain with reluctance took leave of his host with the words: "For the happy sojourn that I have had here may the High King reward you. I must depart on the morn, as ye know. Give me some man, as ye promised, to show me the way to the Green Chapel."

"In good faith," said the host, "all that I promised you, that shall I keep with right good will." Then he assigned him a servant to set him in the way and to conduct him by the downs, so that he should have no need to ford the stream and might take the shortest route through the grove.

Gawain thanked the lord of the castle for the honor given him, and took his leave of the proud ladies with many expressions of gratitude. Then with ser-

vants and a light he was led to his chamber, and blithely brought to his bed to be at rest. Whether he slept soundly, I dare not say, for he had cause to think about the morrow, if he would.

Part IV

THE ADVENTURE AT THE GREEN CHAPEL

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NOW the New Year drew nigh. The night passed and the day scattered the darkness, as the Lord bade. The clouds cast the cold to the earth, together with harm enough from the north to slay the naked. The snow drove sharply and the whistling wind rushed from the heights, filling each vale with great drifts. Gawain, in his bed, listened; although he closed his eyes, he slept but little and heard every cock that crew.

Quickly he sprang up ere day broke, for there was the light of a lamp that gleamed in his bedroom. He called to the chamberlain to bring his armor and to saddle his steed. The other hastened and arrayed Sir Gawain in most approved fashion. First he clad him in his clothes,

to ward off the cold, and then in his harness, which had been carefully kept. The steel plates were brightly polished and the rings of the rich coat of mail were cleansed of rust so that all was as fresh as at first. With glad thanks for the service, the knight bade fetch his steed.

While he dressed himself in his fair raiment, he forgot not the gift of the lady. After he had belted on his sword, he wrapped the girdle of green silk twice round his waist. The lace sat well upon the royal red cloth, which was beautiful to behold. Sir Gawain wore it not for pride of the burnished pendants, glittering with gold, but to protect himself against sword or knife when it behooved him to endure the blow without resistance. Thus prepared, he drew on his long outer coat, adorned with precious stones upon velvet, lined with the costliest fur, and emblazoned with the arms of the wearer.

Then was Gringolet ready, the proud steed, great and strong. He had been

well taken care of in every wise, and Sir Gawain, looking upon the glossy hide, said soberly to himself:

"Here is a retinue in this castle, that thinketh upon honor; may the man who maintains them have joy, and may love betide the dear lady throughout life. Since they for charity cherish a guest and hold honor in their hands, may the Lord that holds the heaven on high repay them and their attendants. And if I should live anywhile upon the earth I would readily bestow upon these retainers some reward, if I might."

Then he stepped into the stirrup and strode aloft. With his gilt heels he struck the spurs into Gringolet, and the steed started to prance upon the stones and would stand no longer. "This castle," said Gawain, "I commend to Christ; may He give it ever good chance."

The drawbridge was let down, the broad gates unbarred and opened. The knight crossed himself quickly and passed

over the bridge. He praised the kneeling porter, who gave him good day, and commended him to God. Then he went on his way with the guide, who should show him that perilous place in which he should receive the rueful stroke. They went by banks where the trees were bare, and they climbed by the cliffs where the cold clung. The clouds held up, but it was ugly thereunder. Mist hovered on the moor and clave to the mountains; each hill had a hat, a huge mist-cloak. The brooks boiled and broke between their banks, dashing fairly upon the sloping shores. Lonely and desert was the way, and at sunrise they were on a high hill, white with snow, when the guide bade Sir Gawain tarry.

"Sir, I have brought you hither, and now ye are not far from that noted place for which ye have so diligently sought. But I say to you truly, since I know you as a knight whom I love well, would ye follow my advice it would be better for

you. The place that ye approach is held full perilous. There dwells one in that waste, the worst in the world, for he is strong and bold and loves to deal mighty blows. He is taller than any man upon earth and his body bigger than the best four in Arthur's house, or any other. There passes none by the Green Chapel, however proud in his arms, whom he does not slay by the dint of his hand, for he is a man immoderate and without mercy. Be it churl, monk, mass priest, or any one else, it seems as pleasing to him to kill them all as to go alive himself. Therefore I say to you, that as truly as ye sit in your saddle, if ye come thither and the knight know it, ye shall be killed, though ye had twenty lives. He has lived there a long time and has engaged in many a contest. Ye may not defend yourself against his sore dints. Good Sir Gawain, let the man alone and go away by some other road; turn into another region where Christ may speed you. I shall hie me

home and swear by Him and all His good saints, so help me God and my halidom, that I shall loyally keep counsel, and never launch a tale that ye fled on account of any man."

"Gramercy," said Gawain, with displeasure. "Well be it to the man who wishes me good, and I believe truly that ye would keep my counsel faithfully; but should I here pass, and attempt to flee for fear, I should be a coward knight and could not be held without reproach. Therefore I will go to the chapel and talk with that man whatever chance may fall, be it for weal or woe. Though he be a stern knave in fight, full well can the Lord shape a protection for His servants."

"Marry," quoth the other, "since it pleases thee to lose thy life, I care not. Have here now thy helmet on thy head, and thy spear in thy hand and ride down this same path by yon rock until thou come to the bottom of this wild valley. Then look a little to thy left and thou

shalt see the chapel itself and the burly man that keeps it. Now, Gawain the noble, farewell, in God's name. For all the gold in the world, I would not go with thee, nor bear thee fellowship through this wood one foot farther." With that the man turned his bridle into the wood, struck the horse with his heels, and galloped away, leaving the knight alone. "By God's self," said Gawain, "I will neither weep nor groan. I have committed myself to Him, and to His will; I am full ready."

He put spurs to Gringolet, took the path close in by the bank, and rode straight to the dale. He saw no sign of a resting-place, but instead, rough, ragged crags, the shadows of which had a weird effect upon him. Then he reined in his horse and looked all round to see the chapel. At last he saw a mound, as it were, upon a level space by a bank, where the stream forked and the water bubbled as though it were boiling. Turning his horse thither,

Sir Gawain dismounted and tied the reins to a linden. He walked around the hill, debating with himself what it might be. It had a hole at one end and one on each side, and was overgrown with grass in tufts everywhere. It was hollow within, like an old cave or a crevice of a crag. "Ah, Lord," said the gentle knight, "can this be the Green Chapel? Here about midnight, the devil himself might say his prayers. Truly, there is enchantment somewhere. This is an ugly oratory and is well suited for the Green Knight to pay here his devotion in demon fashion. Now I feel in my five wits that it is the foul fiend that has appointed me this meeting here, in order to destroy me. This is a chapel of mischance, — ill-luck betide it, — the most cursed kirk that ever I came in."

With helmet on head and lance in hand he walked up to the rough dwelling. Then he heard, from a high hill beyond the brook, a wondrous fierce noise as one

had ground a scythe upon a grindstone. It clattered as though it would split the cliff; it whirred and whetted as water at a mill, and rushed and rang terrible to hear. "By God," quoth Gawain, "that weapon, as I trow, is being prepared for the knight who is to meet me here. Alas! naught helpeth me a whit. Let God work. Though I forego my life no noise shall terrify me."

Then he cried aloud, "Who dwells in this place to hold trust with me? Now is Gawain walking here and if any man wishes aught, let him come hither fast, now or never."

"Abide," answered some one from the bank over his head, "and thou shalt have in all haste that which I have promised thee." Yet the whetting continued rapidly for a time ere the man would descend. Then he came whirling out of a dark hole in the crag, bearing a keen weapon wherewith to deal the blow. It was a Danish ax, quite new, and

sharply ground, with a huge bit four feet wide, no less, and bound to the handle by a shining lace. The knight was all green as at first, face and legs, locks and beard. He was on foot, and when he came to the water, he scorned to wade it, but leaped over on the pole of his ax and strode fiercely across the broad terrace, white with snow.

Sir Gawain went to meet him, but made no low bow. The other said, "Now, sweet sir, one may trust thee to keep an appointment. God preserve thee! Truly thou art welcome to my place, and thou hast timed thy travel as a true man should. Thou knowest the covenant cast between us. At this time, twelve months ago, thou didst take that which fell to thee, and I was to repay thee at this New Year. We are in this valley, verily, alone. Here are no knights to separate us; we may encounter as we like. Have off thy helmet and take at once thy pay. Make no more debate

about it, than I did when thou didst strike off my head at a single blow."

Said Gawain, "Nay, by Him that gave me soul, I shall not begrudge thee thy will for any mischief that may befall. Prepare to strike and I shall make thee no denial; do as ye like." Then he leaned over somewhat and showed the neck all bare, and made as though he nothing doubted, because he would not show fear.

The Green Knight seized his ax to smite Gawain. With all the force in his body he bore it aloft and feigned as mightily as though he would destroy him. Had he struck as fiercely as he purposed, then had been dead of his blow, any one, however doughty. But Gawain looked on the ax as it came gliding down, and shrank a little with the shoulders. The other withheld the bright ax and reproved the knight with scornful words:

"Thou art not Gawain. He is held so good that he never feared even an army,

and thou fleest before thou feelest harm. Such cowardice of that knight I never heard. Neither did I shrink nor strive in King Arthur's house, when thou didst aim thy blow. My head flew to my feet, yet I never fled. And thou, ere harm seize thee, art afraid in heart; wherefore I ought to be called the better man."

Quoth Gawain, "I shrank once, but so will I no more, although if *my* head fall upon the stones I cannot replace it. But hasten, knight, by thy faith, and bring me to the point. Deal me my destiny at once, for I will start no more until thy ax hit me."

"Have at thee, then," said the other, heaving his ax aloft and looking as if he were mad. He struck at him mightily, but wounded him not, for he withheld his hand ere the ax hit him. Gawain awaited the stroke without flinching, and stood as still as a stone, or a stump that is rooted in the ground with a hundred roots.

Then merrily spake the man in green: "Since thy heart is whole, now must I hit thee. Hold aside the noble hood, which Arthur gave thee, and keep thy neck bare."

Gawain replied wrathfully, "Thrash on, thou bold man, thou dost threaten too long. I think thy courage fails thee."

"Forsooth," quoth the other, "so fiercely thou speakest, that I will no longer hinder thine errand." Then he placed himself firmly to strike and wrinkled lips and brow. No wonder Gawain, having no hope of rescue, was ill-pleased. The Green Knight lifted his ax lightly and let the edge fall upon the bare neck. Though he struck sharply, it hurt Sir Gawain no more than to sever the skin on one side. The keen weapon pierced the flesh, so that the bright blood shot over his shoulders to the ground. When the knight saw it glittering on the snow, he sprang forward more than a spear's length, seized his helmet and set

it upon his head, cast his shield over his shoulder and said boldly: "Cease, man, of thy blow; offer me no more. I have received one stroke without any strife, but if thou reach me another, I shall readily requite thee. The covenant made in Arthur's hall was for one stroke only. Therefore, halt."

The Green Knight moved back from him and leaned on his ax. He looked upon the doughty Sir Gawain, who stood fearless and completely armed, and in his heart it pleased him. Then he spoke merrily with a loud voice, "Bold knight, be not so angry. No man here has offered wrong to thee beyond the agreement made at Arthur's court. I promised thee a stroke and thou hast it. Hold thyself well content. I release thee from any further claim. Had I chosen, I could perchance have dealt thee a blow that had done thee woe. First I only menaced thee, on account of the covenant made the first night and faithfully kept. All

the gain thou didst give me, as a true man should. The second menace I proffered thee for the second day, when the kisses thou didst get from my fair wife thou gavest to me in turn. For those two days I offered thee two bare threats, without injury. But the third time thou didst fail, and therefore I gave thee that tap, because that same woven girdle, which thou wearest, is mine. I know well thy kisses, thy temptations, and the wooing by my wife. I sent her to try thee, and soothly it seems to me thou art the most faultless knight that ever went on foot. As a pearl among white peas is more precious than they, so is Gawain among other knights. A little thou didst lack, failing in loyalty, yet that was for no wild work nor for wooing, but for the love of life. Therefore I blame thee the less."

As the Green Knight spake, the blood rushed to Gawain's face on account of his anger and shame. He stood a great

while in study and the first words he said were, "Cursed be both cowardice and covetousness! In you are villainy and vice, the destruction of virtue." Then he unloosed the knot, snatched away angrily the girdle, and cast it to the Green Knight. "Lo, there is the falsity! For fear of thy blow, cowardice taught me to agree with covetousness, and to forsake the liberality and loyalty that belong to knights. I am at fault, and have been a coward. Both sorrow and care come from treachery and untruth. I am worthy of censure and yield me to your will. Hereafter I shall be more wary."

Then the other laughed and said courteously: "The hurt that I had is completely whole, and thou art confessed so clean of thy misdeeds and hast the penance openly of the edge of my ax, that I hold thee absolved from that offense and as innocent as though thou hadst never sinned. I give thee, Sir Gawain, the

girdle, which is gold-hemmed and as green as my gown. Thou mayst think upon this rebuke when thou goest forth among princes of renown, and bear the lace as a token of the adventure between chivalrous knights at the Green Chapel. Ye shall in this New Year return to my castle, and we will revel the remainder of the rich feast full well."

"Nay, forsooth," said Gawain, "I have sojourned sadly. Commend me to thy comely wife who has beguiled me with her cunning stratagem. But it is no marvel for a man to be brought to grief through a woman's wiles. For so was Adam deceived by one and Solomon by many; Delilah dealt Samson his doom, and David was blinded by Bathsheba, so that he endured heavy woe. These were formerly the noblest men under heaven, and since they were all misled by women, it seems to me I ought to be held blameless. But God reward thee for thy girdle. That I shall keep with

good will, not for the joy of the gold, nor the precious silk, nor the wide pendants, nor the beautiful workmanship, but in sign of my fault. I shall see it often when I ride in renown, and shall blame myself for the frailty of the crabbed flesh. When pride shall prick me, on account of prowess of arms, a look at this shall abate it. But one thing, I pray thee, if it displease thee not. Since thou art lord of yonder land wherein I tarried, tell me thy name."

"That shall I truly. Bernlak de Haut-desert I am called in this land, through the might of Morgan la Fay, a pupil of the wizard Merlin. By her magic arts she has humbled full many, and there is none so haughty that she cannot tame. She sent me in this guise to Arthur's hall to test the renown of the Round Table, hoping to grieve Guinevere and cause her to die of fright at the ghastly speaker with his head in his hand. The ancient lady, whom you saw at my castle,

is she, Arthur's half-sister and thine own aunt. I entreat thee to come to her and make merry in my house. My people love thee, and I wish thee as well as any man under heaven, for thy great truth."

But Gawain said nay, he would in no way do so. Sorrowfully they embraced, commended each other to the Prince of Paradise, and parted. Gawain rode swiftly toward the king's court, and the Green Knight went whithersoever he would.

Through wild ways rode Gawain, he who had gotten grace of his life. Oft he harbored in house and often outside. Many adventures he had and came off conqueror. The wound he had received in his neck was healed. He bore the shining girdle as a baldric bound by his side and fastened under his left arm with a knot, — a sign that he had been taken in a fault. Thus he came safely back to Camelot.

Joy awakened in the court when the

great ones knew that Gawain, the Good, had come, for it seemed to them gain. The king and the queen kissed him and many valiant knights sought to embrace him, and asked him about his journey. He told them of all that chanced, — the adventure at the chapel, the behavior of the Green Knight, the love of the lady, and finally, of the lace. Groaning with grief and anger, he told the story and showed the cut he had received for his disloyalty. "Lo," said he, handling the lace, "this is the bond of the blame I bear in my neck, a token of cowardice and covetousness, and the untruth in which I was taken. I must needs wear it as long as I live, for one may not hide his harm. Where it is once fixed it always clings."

The king and the court comforted Sir Gawain and laughed loudly at his tale. They proposed that each knight of the brotherhood should wear a bright green baldric for Gawain's sake. This was ac-

corded by the knights of the Round Table, and he who wore it was honored the more thereafter.

Thus in Arthur's day this adventure befell, whereof the Brutus Book bears witness.

Many adventures herebefore
Have fallen so, ere this;
May He that bare the crown of thorns
Bring us unto His bliss. *Amen.*

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